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1964/11/24

UNITED STATES MILITARY COMMAND, VIETNAM
Office of the Commander
APO 143, San Francisco, California



Briggs

MACJO2

24 November 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR: AMBASSADOR TAYLOR

SUBJECT: Assessment of the Military Situation

1. On the occasion of your September visit to Washington, I provided you my assessment of the military situation then pertaining to Vietnam. I thought you might find it useful if I updated that assessment for your forthcoming trip.

2. In early September we were preoccupied with the problem of keeping the RVNAF intact in the face of internal dissension and potential political or religious purges. We set forth certain minimum conditions which should be met in order to preserve the structure and effectiveness of the RVNAF. These conditions had to do with providing some assurance to the officers that their careers and reputations would not be sacrificed for political expediency or the ambitions or intrigues of political or religious blocks.

3. Happily, some progress has been made. The instigators of the abortive September coup have been expelled from the Army but without excessive vengeance. There have been some noteworthy instances in which highly competent officers have been retained - for example, General Thieu of IV Corps - notwithstanding their political affiliation with groups and factions out of power. On the other hand, we have as yet, no assurance that these gains are more than superficial or more than a lull in the storm. In the long run a tradition which disassociates the military from politics must develop through performance and example. We can only hope to foster this process by improving personnel management and by the motivational training of the young officer. To this task we are turning our attention.

4. On balance, I am pleased with the way the RVNAF has weathered the political storm over the past four months. There have been no instances to my knowledge, of unit defections, although the desertion rate remains higher than we would like. There have been no refusals to obey orders at any echelon. Divisions and Corps commanders are, in the overall, stronger and more able than heretofore. The reintroduction of the "Dalat Generals" has seemed to bring added strength to the High Command.

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5. The most encouraging development of all has been the substantial increase in strength throughout the RVNAF through the volunteer and conscription program. It is our estimate that the present structure will be filled by 1 February. This achievement alone will have a substantial impact on the forces of the ARVN. There is no doubt that understrength battalions have developed an attitude of extreme caution in facing stronger VC battalion formations. Rifle companies have dropped on the average to between 50 and 70 soldiers present for operations; whereas the VC have been known to field battalions of four companies of as many as 150 to 170 men each. By redressing the relative strength, we are entitled to see a proportionate increase in aggressiveness.

6. My general estimate of increased effectiveness within the Vietnamese Army, the Air Force, Navy, and, indeed, the Regional Forces does not extend to the Popular Forces. The Popular Forces, conceived as a means of arming the people in their own defense, have, in the main, failed to achieve an effective identity with the local rural population. This does not mean the concept is invalid for the reasons behind submarginal performance are diverse. It does mean that this area, above all others, requires our urgent attention, and particularly with respect to motivational factors.

7. I am very much aware that, in spite of the current and prospective increases in the effectiveness of the RVNAF, the Pacification Program as a whole has not made comparable progress, and in many important areas has regressed. It is no good congratulating ourselves on the progress in one sector when the campaign as a whole is not going well.

KEY ISSUES:

8. In order to get pacification moving again there are, of course, many things to be done. However, three are in the first order of importance:

One: To set concrete but attainable short range goals at each echelon of command and administration, the attainment of which, in a cumulative sense, would provide forward momentum to the pacification effort.

Two: To develop more effective means for asserting the U.S. position with respect to policy and planning at the Saigon level.

Three: To take positive action against external support of the insurgency.

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9. Regarding the inducement of forward momentum, I have prepared a statement of military goals to be attained by 1 February and 1 April which I hope will be adopted by the RVNAF. These goals should cause each echelon of command to program, and perhaps achieve, a certain amount of forward movement. While each command will be encouraged to choose three local goals of particular importance to his command or region, there are certain goals of general applicability:

- a. Increases in combat strength, and concomitantly reduction in the desertion rate.
- b. Elimination of combat ineffective battalions.
- c. Increases in VC killed, captured and induced to surrender.
- d. Additional hamlets to be pacified or placed under pacification.

Also relevant to the generation of forward momentum is the whole question of Force Structure increases, on the first increment (Alternate I) of which you have passed favorable judgement.

10. With respect to increasing U. S. influence in planning, programming and execution at the Saigon level, the U. S. Mission must continue its association with the Internal Security Committee (ISC) and establish advisors with its Permanent Bureau. I am convinced that we must get involved at the national planning level if the civil and military effort is to be coordinated and managed effectively, and if the U. S. is to exert the necessary influence and control.

11. The external threat we must deal with as soon as some government stability is manifest and the counterinsurgency campaign makes some progress. Pacification of South Vietnam is not likely to succeed as long as the VC receive extensive external direction and support. History has shown that it is impossible to close a frontier, and especially one configured like Vietnam, by physical means against an enemy determined to penetrate. Consequently, Hanoi must be induced by military means and psychological pressures to make a conscious decision to curtail support in its own national interest.

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FAVORABLE TRENDS:

12. Manpower and Morale:

a. The strength of the Armed Forces continues to increase steadily. During the period 30 April 1964 to 31 October 1964, the Regular Force increased in strength from 207,418 to 230,474, a total of 23,056. The Regional Force increased from 85,660 to 92,265, a total of 6,605. The Popular Force increased from 96,263 to 159,392, a total of 63,129.

b. In addition, the collective call-up of 20-25 year olds, from October 20 to November 3, resulted in about 10,000 reporting for physical examination and induction processing. The call-up has also had a favorable impact on the volunteer program. The collective call-up, followed by the current enforcement phase, is the most significant action ever taken by the GVN to improve the effectiveness of the conscription program. If that program is vigorously and continuously enforced, concomitant with an aggressive recruiting program, sufficient personnel can be provided to meet the end CY 64 force goals of the Regular Force.

c. In the past two months, the High Command has taken additional steps to improve the morale and welfare of the Armed Forces:

(1) Officers and NCO's (through Corporal I) of the Regular and Regional Forces received a 10% increase in basic pay, while the lower three enlisted grades received an increase of 300 piastres per month. Additionally, the High Cost of Living Allowance for NCO's has been increased to the same rate as that of the officers. The pay of all personnel in the Popular Force was also increased by 300 piastres per month.

(2) The first large group of officer promotions since April was effected with the advancement of over 1,100 lieutenants to Captain. Approximately 335 field grade officer promotions are scheduled in November. GHQ RVNAF announced EM promotion quotas, totalling 20,171 for November, which is greater than the total number promoted from 1 Jan to 31 Oct 64.

(3) The government has authorized CINCRVNAF to make command promotions. Implementing regulations are prepared in draft form and provide that officers in combat units assigned to a command position - - Company, Battalion, Regiment, or Division Commander - - may be promoted to the rank authorized for the respective position, he will also receive the pay and allowances prescribed for that position, regardless of his regular rank. Upon reassignment, the individual reverts to his regular rank unless he assumes another command position requiring the same rank. This plan should enhance the morale of officers now serving in combat units.

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(4) GHQ RVNAF has also initiated action to insure experienced senior lieutenants and captains are being utilized as combat company commanders. A survey of the present ranks of all company commanders has been made. Consideration is being given to (a) promotion, to the extent practicable, in incumbents to 1st Lieutenant or captain as appropriate, and (b) transfer of some captains from overstrength headquarters to combat units for duty with companies and battalions.

(5) Substantial progress is being achieved to meet the expanded goals of the CY 64 dependent housing program. (40,000 units) Although the program was not approved until June, the entire budget of 350 million piastres has been obligated, contracts have been awarded for 38,300 units, and an initial increment of 2,500 units delivered.

(6) A proposal has been approved by MOD to expend the facilities and stocks and to increase operating personnel in the RVNAF PX system.

13. Strengthening of U.S. Advisory Effort:

a. Sub-sector advisory teams, usually consisting of two officers and three enlisted men (one is a medical NCO) are now operating in some 75 districts. This rapid buildup will continue and by the first of the year approximately half of the total (239) districts will be manned. Authority to tailor and move teams to suit the needs of the local situation has been delegated to Corps advisors. Logistic growing pains attending this rapid buildup are expected to ease by 1 January. The program has met with excellent response from Vietnamese officials; teams are already active and productive in many fields, both military and civil. Early indications of benefits derived and anticipated are: prestige and stability of local government is enhanced; additional ties and communications are created with remote and isolated districts; backup channels are provided for support of districts; a means of monitoring actual progress, activity and requirements is provided; and U.S. supervision of aid flow is extended. Thus far, casualties have been light, advice well received, and USOM-USIS-MACV coordination excellent at this level.

b. In the past two months, air support has been strengthened by the arrival of a C-123 Squadron, a CV-2B (Caribou) Company and some 45 UH-1Bs. Still another, the ninth, UH-1B helicopter company is due next month. The nine UH-1B companies will provide adequate support for the advisory effort and materially enhance the mobility of the ARVN units.

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14. Development of a Pacification Focus:

a. The Hop Tac Plan is progressing slowly. What is significant is that civil-military-police planners are working together, and guiding the first integrated pacification program in Vietnam. Civilian and military police activity has improved markedly, as witness the large amount of contraband confiscated in a rudimentary but steadily improving population and resources control system established in the inner zone on the Hop Tac area. A Saigon level coordinating element, the Hop Tac Council, has been formed and is operating.

b. The 25th Division, less its Engineer battalion, has completed its move to Long An and Hau Nghia provinces.

c. Twelve additional 155 howitzers have arrived in-country and will be deployed in III and IV Corps areas. In addition to this increase, ARVN is deploying another 155 battalion to the III Corps area. The priorities established for the remainder of the artillery reorganization parallel the pacification effort; in this connection, III and IV Corps artillery reorganization will be completed by 1 December.

15. Augmentation of Air Capabilities:

a. The VNAF will shortly have four fully combat ready A-1H squadrons (by present plan, will be built to six squadrons by 1 Dec 65). VNAF now has 91 A-1H aircraft with 5 additional scheduled for delivery next week. An increased utilization of A-1H aircraft from 50 to 60 hours per aircraft per month will be placed into effect as soon as spare parts arrive in-country. The two 2nd Air Division A-1E squadrons have 38 aircraft and 6 additional scheduled to arrive on 2 December.

b. VNAF now has three H-34 helicopter squadrons operational; the fourth will be operational by March 1965. Increase of the VNAF liaison squadrons from 20 to 30 aircraft has been approved by CINCPAC and forwarded to JCS; meanwhile, programmed flying hours were raised to 90 hours per month for VNAF O-1A/U-17A aircraft, effective 1 November. Pilot and maintenance personnel will be available to meet the additional liaison requirement.

c. The capability of the VNAF pilots is improving, particularly in night operations. This proficiency will be further enhanced by the training and assistance that will be provided by additional 20 USAF fighter squadron advisors now arriving. The air-ground operations system is being steadily improved by better communications, more rigorous training and the provision of air liaison and control teams at regimental level. Procedures designed to maximize mutual cooperation and support among USAF, VNAF and Army aviation have been developed.

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d. Additional all weather and night surveillance capability will be available in January with the introduction of an Aerial Surveillance Company (Mohawk aircraft). This company will be equipped with both infra-red and side looking aerial radar (SLAR) detection devices.

16. U.S. Special Forces: U.S. Special Forces will be increased from 947 to 1299 personnel by 1 April 1965. Command and control will be strengthened with this action. This increase in U.S. strength will be paralleled by recruitment of some 10,000 more CIDG personnel by July 1965.

17. Increased Effectiveness of Naval Forces:

a. Vietnamese Navy Landing Ship Medium (LSM) is being outfitted with MAP supplied material, dental, and field dispensary vans for use in PsyWar/Civic Action operations in coastal and river areas of the delta. A Mobile Medical Training Team will arrive in January 1965, and the unit will then become operational.

b. Four Patrol Motor Gunboats (PGM) will be added to the Sea Force in mid-1965, thereby increasing the number of patrol units by approximately 13%.

c. A new River Assault Group (RAG), the seventh, together with craft to increase the lift capability of two existing RAGs, will be fully operational by mid-1965. The foregoing will increase combat lift capability by 50% (from 6 to 9 Infantry battalions). The Landing Craft Medium (LCM) of the seventh RAG will each have the capability of lifting two M113 Armored Personnel Carriers whereas the present LCM can lift only one.

d. A proposal to integrate the paramilitary junkmen into the regular Navy has been forwarded by the Vietnamese Navy and is awaiting decision at High Command. Approval of this proposal will be a first step toward raising the manning level of the Coastal Force to full authorization. This in turn will contribute to improvement of readiness and operational employment.

18. Intelligence: The coordination and exchange of information among intelligence agencies and within the operations and intelligence centers established at all sectors continues to improve. During the current fiscal

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year the ARVN clandestine collection unit has doubled its strength and is now training new assets, both in-country and off-shore. The counterpart U. S. Advisory Detachment (Det I, 500th INTC Group) is programming longer range operations and increased technical support. A significant increase in production from these agent operations has already been realized. With the presence of advisors at sub-sectors and a new naval intelligence net, an increased intelligence flow is envisaged.

19. The RVNAF Logistics System: Is being improved by reorganization and augmentation of its principal agencies:

a. At GHQ, the joint logistics staff and chiefs of ARVN technical services are being incorporated into a Headquarters Logistical Command through which the DCSLOG will exercise command over the Chiefs of the Technical Services and the Area Logistical Commands (ALCs).

b. The present four CALC's, aligned in direct support of each of the ARVN Corps, are being reorganized into five Area Logistical Commands. These will support all RVNAF regular and paramilitary forces within a prescribed geographical area regardless of Corps area boundaries.

c. The Administrative and Direct Support Logistic (A&L) Companies, until now a part of the Regional Forces Command supporting only these forces and the Popular Forces, are being incorporated directly into the ARVN logistic system, increased in strength, and extended to the sub-sector level by addition of logistic contact teams.

20. RVNAF operational techniques and tactics: Constant advisory emphasis has produced some evident results. Recently, several excellent examples of coordinated air, naval and ground operations have occurred. Close air support requests indicate the growing confidence of ground commanders in VNAF's ability to deliver accurate support. Greater availability of mission ready helicopters in October increased the tempo of heliborne operations (Eagle Flights) in IV Corps; and considerable success was achieved by armed helicopters in the surveillance role in III Corps. VNAF, U. S. Air Force, and Army aviation are working together as a team.

PROBLEM AREAS:

21. While many problem areas still remain, all are either under study or are currently receiving advisor emphasis. Most pressing are the following:

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a. Deficiencies in leadership training and development, particularly of junior officers and noncommissioned officers. Because this is of central importance, it is given special emphasis at all advisory levels, and particularly at the National Training Centers.

b. The capabilities for conscription and recruitment of manpower to meet the requirements of approved plans and programs have been significantly enhanced by the recent call-up and enforcement phase. The problem now is to insure that the momentum is continued. This is largely dependent upon government stability.

c. Desertion and AWOL rates must be reduced. This problem is directly related to frequent changes of senior commanders, unit relocations on short notice and the resultant family separations. This will require continued effort to improve the troop information program, to provide additional family housing, to improve the morale and welfare of the members of the Armed Forces, and to more effective enforcement of disciplinary measures.

d. Development of an improved and responsive paramilitary force at village and hamlet level, as a sine quo non of an effective pacification program.

e. Orientation and training of military units for their pacification tasks. A principal requirement is preparation of selected units for participation in various aspects of population and resources control operations. Another is the entire area of peasant/soldier relationships.

f. The lack of trained and qualified leaders in the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). A special training program for officers and noncommissioned officers was initiated on 2 November to alleviate this program. Additionally, some form of military status appears essential if this force is to achieve maximum effectiveness.

g. Tactical deficiencies. This runs the entire gamut. We continue to work to improve the rapidity and effectiveness of reaction forces; to develop methods of detecting and punishing VC ambushes; to make ARVN conscious of the essentiality of thorough ground reconnaissance and patrolling; to exploit and increase means of acquiring combat intelligence.

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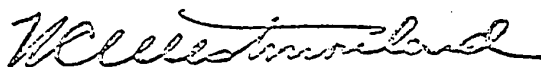
STATUS OF CONTINGENCY PLANS:

22. MACV refinement of Special, Contingency and Emergency Plans continues.

a. CINCPAC revision of OPLAN 37, integrating concepts of Special Plans 33, 34 and 99 is expected by 1 December. Meanwhile, combined planning and preparation for limited ground operations into LAOS has progressed. RVNAF should be ready to implement ground operations by 10 December.

b. 34A MAROPS have been resumed. Planning for initiation of 34A air strikes against the DRV is well underway. A scenario is being developed to provide smooth phasing from initial strikes by VNAF, through rising levels of intensity, integrating VNAF, FARMGATE, USAF, USN as required to accomplish assigned missions.

c. Preliminary combined planning with GVN against DRV aggression resulted in tentative working level agreement on the nature of the threat and a concept of operations. In a parallel action, RVNAF High Command published Emergency Defense Plan PT-1-64 on 10 August 1964. The plan provides for the defense of RVN in the event of overt aggression by DRV/CHICOM forces. Although the plan in some areas is vague, ambiguous and inaccurate, with some modification, it would be compatible with existing US/SEATO plans. MACV staff and senior field advisors have reviewed the plan. Comments have been consolidated and have been submitted informally to the High Command.



W. C. WESTMORELAND
General, United States Army
Commanding

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